

Fights for Critical Hurricane Protection Project in Committee Hearing
November 18, 2009

WASHINGTON, D.C. - U.S. Congressman Charlie Melancon (LA-03) testified today in support of moving forward on a critical hurricane protection project for Terrebonne and Lafourche Parishes in a Congressional hearing today. Congressman Melancon said the people of south Louisiana couldn't afford any more delays on the Morganza to the Gulf Hurricane and Flood Protection project during a statement before the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure. *Fights for Critical Hurricane Protection Project in Committee Hearing*
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WASHINGTON, D.C. - U.S. Congressman Charlie Melancon (LA-03) testified today in support of moving forward on a critical hurricane protection project for Terrebonne and Lafourche Parishes in a Congressional hearing today. Congressman Melancon said the people of south Louisiana couldn't afford any more delays on the Morganza to the Gulf Hurricane and Flood Protection project during a statement before the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure.

Morganza is a 64-mile system of levees, locks, and floodgates in south Louisiana that will, when complete, protect about 120,000 people and 1,700 square miles of land against deadly and destructive storm surges, such as those caused by Hurricanes Katrina, Rita, Ike and Gustav.

Congressman Melancon noted that Morganza is so critical to communities in Terrebonne and Lafourche Parishes that the local citizens have been taxing themselves for years to build portions of the levee system on their own. However, Melancon added, **"they need the federal government to be a partner in this project."**

Melancon continued, **"By delaying progress on Morganza, the federal government is turning a deaf ear to the 120,000 Americans in south Louisiana who currently have little or no defense against storms and are like sitting ducks in the path of the next killer hurricane. And we are jeopardizing the energy security of our entire country."**

"As we remember all too well from Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, shutting down the infrastructure in south Louisiana that supports oil and gas production in the Gulf of Mexico has a serious economic impact on the entire nation."

Congressman Melancon gave his testimony as part of a hearing on proposals for the 2010 *Water Resources Development Act* (WRDA). Morganza was first authorized by the 2000 WRDA, but missed deadlines by the Army Corps, increases to cost estimates, and several reevaluation studies have delayed construction on the project. The latest reanalysis study is not due to be completed until December 2012.

Congressman Melancon stated, **"It is inexcusable to me that the Corps has failed to move this project forward, even after the long process of becoming authorized by this Committee. Worse yet, Federal dollars that could be better spent on construction are**

wasted on studies for elements already studied and settled upon."

Pledging to work with committee members to move construction on Morganza forward, Melancon concluded, **"Morganza to the Gulf will provide critical hurricane protection to over 100,000 Americans in south Louisiana, help prevent further loss of wetlands, and increase our nation's energy security. We can't afford to delay it any longer."**

Video of Congressman Melancon's testimony today can be viewed on the Committee's website [here](#) . Congressman Melancon's testimony begins at minute 30:54.

The text of Congressman Melancon's full statement is copied below.

Testimony from Rep. Charlie Melancon

November 18, 2009

Thank you Madam Chairwoman,

I appreciate the opportunity to testify here today in support of a very important project in the heart of my district in coastal Louisiana.

The Morganza to the Gulf Hurricane Protection Project is a 64-mile system of levees, locks, and floodgates in south Louisiana that will, when complete, protect about 120,000 people and 1,700 square miles of land against deadly and destructive storm surges, such as those caused by Hurricanes Katrina, Rita, Ike and Gustav.

Morganza would protect an area of the county responsible for one-third of our nation's oil and natural gas production. Our coastal wetlands are a habitat for 30% of the seafood consumed in this country. And our communities are great places to live, with some of the nation's most stable housing prices and lowest unemployment rates. Louisiana is America's working coast.

Morganza was first considered in the early 1990s, when a reconnaissance study was completed to determine if providing hurricane protection to southeast Louisiana was in the Federal interest. Ultimately, the study found that the contributions these communities make to our nation's energy security made it in the Federal interest to protect this area from hurricanes and storm surge.

While WRDA 2000 included an authorization for Morganza to the Gulf, it was contingent upon a chief's report being completed that year. The Corps of Engineers missed that deadline, and progress on Morganza screeched to a halt.

However, Morganza is so critical in protecting these communities from hurricanes, the locals passed a tax on themselves to try to build parts of the levee system on their own. Instead of standing idly by and waiting for the federal government to save them, the citizens of this area are taxing themselves \$6 million a year to protect themselves. And the state of Louisiana has also committed significant resources to begin construction without Federal assistance. But they need the federal government to be a partner in this project, and have anxiously followed

the progress of WRDA for years, hoping for full authorization for Morganza.[]

In November of 2007, WRDA overcame a Presidential veto and authorized Morganza to the Gulf at \$886.7m - a cost estimate supplied by the Corps.

In December of 2007, the Corps decided that the project would exceed its authorization level by more than 20% and must be re-evaluated. This is unusual treatment for a project that has not received any post-authorization Federal construction appropriation.

To make matters worse, the Corps has essentially stopped all progress on this project since its authorization, while they complete a re-analysis due in December 2012.[] Engineering and design work that was funded and ongoing in 2006 has been halted.

This past spring (2009), after reviewing for nearly a year and re-reviewing alternatives that were also a part of the EIS alternative process for the Chief's Report, the Corps returned to its position of supporting the project alignment that was within the Chief's Report completed in Aug of 2002. Louisianians in Terrebonne and Lafourche had gone another seven years without hurricane protection, and the Corps was right back where it started.

It is inexcusable to me that the Corps has failed to move this project forward, even after the long process of becoming authorized by this Committee.[] Worse yet, Federal dollars that could be better spent on construction are wasted on studies for elements already studied and settled upon.

As the Corps re-evaluates Morganza to the Gulf for the third time, keeping the clock running during their decades of analysis, my constituents remain exposed to the Gulf of Mexico and deadly storms.[] By delaying progress on Morganza, the federal government is turning a deaf ear to the 120,000 Americans in south Louisiana who currently have little or no defense against storms and are like sitting ducks in the path of the next killer hurricane.[] And we are jeopardizing the energy security of our entire country.[] As we remember all too well from Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, shutting down the infrastructure in south Louisiana that supports oil and gas production in the Gulf of Mexico has a serious economic impact on the entire nation.

To address this, I plan to work with the Committee between now and Dec. 3rd to find a way forward and expedite construction of the Morganza hurricane protection project.[] The time for delays and endless re-evaluations has passed.[] We must move forward, whether it be by constructing elements that are ready to be built now, or by finally building the entire system, a project that has already completed the NEPA process and included in the Chief's report. Morganza to the Gulf will provide critical hurricane protection to over 100,000 Americans in south Louisiana, help prevent further loss of wetlands, and increase our nation's energy security.[] We can't afford to delay it any longer.

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